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Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs

Assembly Bill 66

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of Assembly Bill 66.

Early this session, my office was contacted by the Midwest regional liaison for the U.S. Department of Defense's State Liaison Office, Jim Rickel. Mr. Rickel told my staff about the USA 4 Military Families initiative, in which the Department encourages state legislators to address various quality-of-life issues facing service members.

The initiative's top priority for Wisconsin was a set of reforms affecting child custody and physical placement orders in cases where one of the parents is a service member. These cases present some unique challenges, particularly when the service member has been or could be called to active duty. Although some of the initiative's "best practices" in this area of the law are already on the books in Wisconsin, there were several others that Wisconsin has not yet adopted, and these are the basis of Assembly Bill 66.

First, AB 66 would forbid courts from modifying legal custody orders when the service member is on active duty as part of the U.S. armed forces. Second, AB 66 would require courts to expedite family actions at the request of the service member. Third, service members on active duty would be able to participate in family hearings over telephone or other electronic media. Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, AB 66 would allow the service member to ask the court to modify the physical placement order so that the service member may designate a third party, such as a grandparent or other relative, may exercise the service member's placement rights while he or she is away.

AB 66 is simple, straightforward legislation that protects the rights of service members who are parents and allows them to participate in important decisions that could significantly affect their relationships with their children. Service members who are on active duty have enough to worry about.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Assembly Bill 66.